

MEDICAL HISTORY

HOWARD UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE AND THE EDUCATION OF CARIBBEAN-BORN MEDICAL DOCTORS

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When the founding fathers established Howard University in 1867, it is clear that they wanted the new educational institution to have a cosmopolitan character. An indication of their determination can be found in the remarks of Congressman George Hoar of Massachusetts to the United States House of Representatives on June 6, 1870. Quoted in a history of Howard University by Professor Walter Dyson, Congressman Hoar declared:

...Let it be remembered, too, that in this institution [Howard University] as in no other in the land, it is believed, the Anglo-Saxon, the Celts, the Indian, the Mongolian, the Greek, and the African already sit, side by side, on the same benches. All races and both sexes have here in the pursuit of knowledge a fair and equal favor.¹

Two years later, in one of his reports, Howard University President Oliver O. Howard stated his intention to maintain the institution's broad world outlook by, "...drawing our pupils from all classes, conditions and nationalities."¹ Throughout its history, Howard University's international essence has been reflected in its faculty, student body, and staff. This article examines the role of Howard University College of Medicine over the past 125 years in the education of physicians who were born in the islands of the Caribbean or in mainland neighboring countries often considered to be part of the West Indies.

This article is based on material gathered by the author as part of a November 1993 exhibit at Howard University celebrating the 125th Anniversary of the College of Medicine. Requests for reprints should be addressed to Dr Calvin H. Sinnette, 1016 S Wayne St, Apt 409, Arlington, VA 22204.

Described by one observer as "...a glistening archipelago," the chain of Caribbean islands serves as "a barrier against the rough Atlantic [and] sweeps from the western tip of Cuba 1200 miles east to the Virgin Islands, south another 500 miles to the top of South America, and then west another 500 miles along the coast of Venezuela."² For the purpose of this article, the size of the territory is even greater because it includes such mainland countries as Guyana, Panama and Belize. Bermuda and the Bahamas, although lying outside the Caribbean per se, also are included because they and the selected mainland countries have large populations of African descent, many of whom share a common historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage. Understandably, therefore, a number of individuals born in the Bahamas, Bermuda, Guyana, Panama, and Belize chose to obtain their professional education at Howard University College of Medicine.

Saba, the smallest Caribbean island, is only 5 square miles in size, while Cuba has a land mass in excess of 42 000 square miles. Of the mainland countries, Belize measures nearly 9000 square miles while Panama and Guyana cover 29 000 and 83 000 square miles, respectively. The islands of the Caribbean encompass an area of more than 1 million square miles and are divided into two biogeographical groups. The first consists of the predominantly larger islands and are referred to as the Greater Antilles. The smaller islands, known as the Lesser Antilles, are further subdivided into the Leeward and Windward islands depending on their geographical relationship to the prevailing tradewinds. Approximately 37 million people currently reside in the Caribbean.

The data presented in this article were obtained from

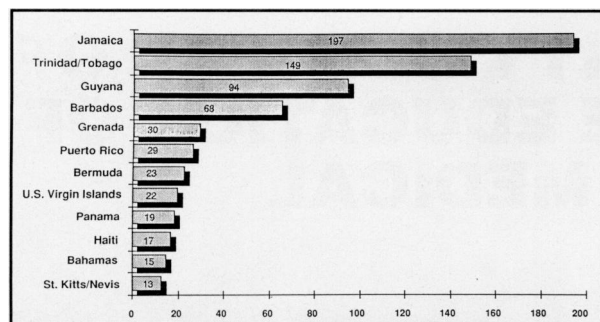


Figure 1. Places of birth of Caribbean-born medical graduates of Howard University School of Medicine listed in rank order for major contributing countries.

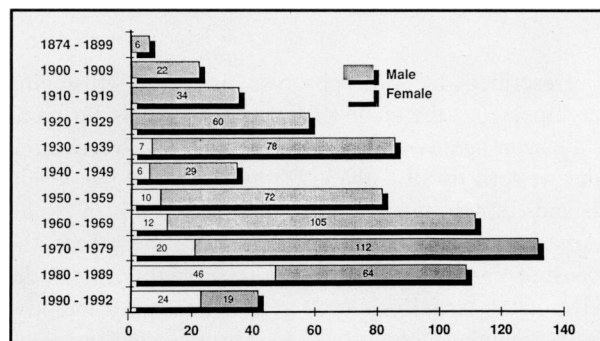


Figure 3. Caribbean-born medical graduates of Howard University School of Medicine listed by decade and gender.

a review of material stored in the records of some 6400 students who were enrolled in Howard University College of Medicine since its founding in 1868. Much of the information concerning the very early graduates was obtained from the Howard University Alumni Directory (1870-1919). In a number of instances, information contained in the stored records was cross checked with microfilm records currently on file in the Office of the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Other published Howard University alumni directories were also consulted to verify information obtained from the main record files. It is estimated that there are between 10 and 15 additional Caribbean-born medical graduates whose enrollment records were not retrievable and, therefore, are not included in this report.

Of the 26 countries furnishing students to the Howard pool of Caribbean-born medical graduates, 12 are classified as major contributors (Figure 1). The remaining 14 are classified as minor contributing countries (Figure 2). In the official enrollment records, some students listed their birthplace merely as "British

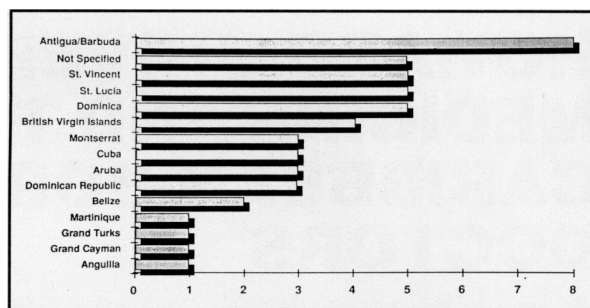


Figure 2. Places of birth of Caribbean-born medical graduates of Howard University School of Medicine listed in rank order for minor contributing countries.

West Indies" but failed to give the exact location. In such cases, their place of birth is listed as "unspecified," and this group is listed in Figure 2 with the minor contributing countries.

In 1874, Eliezer Clark of Barbados was the first student born in the Caribbean to graduate from Howard University College of Medicine. Eleven years passed before a second student, this time from Haiti, satisfactorily completed the prescribed course of study. By the turn of the century, four additional Caribbean-born students had graduated. Interestingly, of these six early graduates, three were from Barbados. The numbers increased rapidly over the next few years so that by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, 22 additional Caribbean-born students had graduated from Howard's College of Medicine. Until World War II and the immediate postwar period (1940-1949), each decade in the first half of this century witnessed an increase in the number of Caribbean-born graduates (Figure 3).

As might be expected, the second World War seriously interfered with the educational aspirations of most of the young men and women in the region. With the end of the war, the number of graduates from the Caribbean increased once again reaching a peak in the decade of the 1970s. Thereafter, a steady decline has taken place to which a number of factors may be ascribed. In 1948, the medical school of the University of the West Indies (UWI) admitted its first class on the Mona campus in Jamaica. The following year, the University of Puerto Rico medical school was started. Two additional medical schools, Universidad del Caribe School of Medicine and the Ponce School of Medicine, were opened in Puerto Rico in the latter half of the 1970s. Caribbean-born students seeking a medical education also could find wider opportunities to pursue their studies in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Europe.

TABLE. CARIBBEAN-BORN GRADUATES OF HOWARD UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Graduate	Class	Accomplishments
Dr Ewart Brown	1972	Elected in 1993 to serve as a member of the Bermuda Parliament; currently serves as Chairman of the Board of <i>The Bermuda Times</i> newspaper
Dr Eustace Cann	1933	Served in the Bermuda House of Assembly (1938-1948) and the Bermuda Executive Council (1962-1963)
Dr John Cann	1974	Has served as a medical officer in the Bermuda Department of Health since 1979; in 1983, he was appointed as Chief Medical Officer and has served in that position to the present
Dr Neville Connell	1971	Served as Minister of Health, Government of Trinidad and Tobago (1981-1985)
Dr Melvin Evans	1944	Served initially as the appointed Governor of the US Virgin Islands (1968-1971) and then as the first elected Governor (1971-1975); served as the US Virgin Islands Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago (1982-1984)
Dr Charles Julian	1907	Served as a government medical officer in St Kitts and during his lifetime was a highly respected clergyman throughout much of the Caribbean
Dr Glendon Logan	1931	Served as Minister of Housing and Social Welfare, government of Jamaica (1957-1962)
Dr Roy Schneider	1965	Served as Commissioner of Health, US Virgin Islands (1977-1986)
Dr Arleigh Scott	1925	After being knighted, Sir Winston Scott became the first Governor-General of Barbados of African descent and served in that position from 1967 to 1976
Dr Erskine Simmons	1961	Has served as a member of the Barbados Parliament from 1986 to the present
Dr Anselm St George	1954	Served as a member of the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament (1986-1991)
Dr George Thomas	1967	Served as a member of the Bermuda Parliament (1983-1989); Minister of Education (1984-1986); and in 1985 was Justice of the Peace

In addition, a number of other events were taking place that made it increasingly difficult for students born in the Caribbean to obtain their medical education in the United States. Among these were the rising cost of living, greater employment restrictions on individuals holding student visas, the imposition of a tuition surcharge on foreign students, repeated currency devaluations in a number of Caribbean countries, and the imposition of tighter currency controls by many of the Caribbean countries. All of the new developments served to make Howard University less attractive to students from the Caribbean.

By 1992, the medical school at Howard University had graduated 726 students from 25 islands and three mainland countries in the Caribbean (Figure 1). Five of the English-speaking territories, Jamaica, Trinidad/Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, and Grenada, account for 538 (74%) of the total number. Jamaica, with 197 (27%) graduates, has the largest number followed in rank order by Trinidad/Tobago (21%), Guyana (13%), Barbados (9%), and Grenada (4%) (Figure 2). It should be noted that with a total population slightly in excess of 4 million, these five countries constitute only 11% of the region's total population.

In 1877, a noteworthy event took place in Howard University College of Medicine when the institution conferred a medical degree on Eunice P. Shadd, the first African-American female graduate.* It was not until 1930, however, that the first Caribbean-born woman, Pearl Strachn of Jamaica, received her medical degree from Howard. The greater than 50-year hiatus might be ascribed to the persistence in the Caribbean of rigid Victorian attitudes toward the education of women. This applied particularly to those women who were seeking professional careers and even more so when it required them to travel abroad to receive their education. After 1930, with the exception of the war years, when there was a small decline in the number of female Caribbean-born graduates, a rise occurred each decade thereafter (Figure 3). It is of note that during the decade of the 1980s, Caribbean-born women constituted 42% of the total number of Howard University medical graduates who came from that part of the world. This

*It is not widely known that by 1877, Howard University College of Medicine had awarded medical degrees to four white women: Mary Spackman, Class of 1872; Mary Parsons, Class of 1874; and Frances Hillyes and Grace Roberts, Class of 1877.

remarkable increase parallels the overall increase in female graduates seen in the College of Medicine during the same period.

It is extremely difficult to ascertain the number of Howard University Caribbean-born medical graduates who returned permanently to their home countries after completing their education and training. To undertake the collection of these data is a task well beyond the author's capability. One indirect bit of information that sheds some light on this subject is a 1970 study published by the medical faculty at UWI. It revealed that 22 years after the first class was admitted, 20.8% of the 298 graduates had migrated to developed countries.³ From this report, as well as other anecdotal information, it would not be unreasonable to believe that as many as 60% or more of the Caribbean-born Howard University College of Medicine graduates chose not to return permanently to their country of origin. It may be argued that Howard University College of Medicine participated in luring "the best and the brightest" from the Caribbean, thereby contributing to the region's "brain drain." On the other hand, those Caribbean-born Howard University medical graduates who opted to return permanently to their home countries have contributed not only to the improvement of health services, but in many instances they have become major figures in the economic, political, and social life of their respective countries.

Despite diligent efforts to gather information from each of the involved Caribbean countries, geographical distances and communication difficulties proved insurmountable. As a result, it has not been possible to compile a complete listing of Caribbean-born Howard University medical graduates who have made notable

contributions to the development of each Caribbean country. Nevertheless, a partial listing to illustrate the breadth of their activities is provided in the Table.

Predictions about future Caribbean-born enrollment in the College of Medicine are fraught with imponderables. Trends suggest a continuing decline reaching a plateau that will be considerably lower than what has prevailed over the past 30 to 40 years. Yet, regardless of the ultimate outcome, it would be impossible to overlook the enormously beneficial role Howard University College of Medicine has played in Caribbean development since the first student from the region graduated from the institution nearly 120 years ago.

Acknowledgments

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